

Murals Matter program to highlight cultural significance of art form and Watsonville artist Guillermo “Yermo” Aranda

Documentary on Aranda’s mural restoration premieres on June 15

By Hannah Hagemann | Santa Cruz Sentinel PUBLISHED: June 3, 2021



Muralist Guillermo “Yermo” Aranda with current and former Watsonville High School students who helped repaint the “Sueños” mural. That restoration is the subject of *Painter of Dreams*, a documentary to premier on June 15, as part of Murals Matters. (Contributed photo—Martha Victoria Vega Cendejas)

WATSONVILLE — A multimedia program on the cultural significance of murals, set to take place June 15-18, will include the premier of *Painter of Dreams*, a documentary film on Watsonville muralist Guillermo “Yermo” Aranda. The Watsonville Film Festival has teamed up with the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, UC Santa Cruz, the Santa Cruz Art League and Pajaro Valley Arts to present the “Murals Matter” program, featuring two virtual documentary screenings and an in-person event.

Aranda, who was awarded Santa Cruz County 2020 artist of the year, has painted countless murals in Watsonville and across the Central California Coast.

Painter of Dreams, to be unveiled online at watsonvillefilmfest.org on June 15, focuses on the artist's efforts to restore the mural "Sueños" or "Dreams." The colorful art piece greeted Watsonville High students in the cafeteria since the '90s, until last year when, without community input, it was abruptly covered up. "There was no process, it was deleted," Watsonville Film Festival Director Consuelo Alba said. "In the film Guillermo talks about this process and what happened."

The mural, created by Aranda and Watsonville High students at the time, was repainted in April after community members came forward, frustrated and sad that "Sueños" had been covered.

"Murals are definitely a very important piece of the cultural landscape in Watsonville because we have artists in the community, living in the community, representing the community, and we have very few spaces to express that," Alba said. This isn't the first time Aranda received administrative pushback on the mural, Alba said. The film delves into that history of "Sueños" and documents the restoration process, during which Aranda worked with the original students who painted it in the '90s, as well as current students.

In addition to Dreams, directed by Gabriel Jesse Medina and Marcus Cisneros, Alice Street, directed by Spencer Wilkinson, will also debut June 15. That documentary centers on a mural in Oakland, that's brought together both Black and Chinese American artists.

"It's a very important, and deep conversation about the murals, the spaces that communities have, or don't have for artistic expression," Alba said of the two documentaries.

The program also includes discussion elements — the first an online Q&A Zoom event with muralist Aranda on June 17 and the second, on June 18 in person.

That second event will be held at the Watsonville Plaza and will feature talks on themes shared between the two documentaries. Creativity kits honoring Juneteenth, and Black history, will also be provided by the Museum of Art History on Friday.

For Central Coast Latinos and Mexican Americans, murals hold a strong cultural significance and tradition, Alba said, nodding to Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

"We want people to see who we are, where we are coming from on the street, not just in museums, it has to be out there in the world," Alba said. "That was the intention of those muralists."

The organizers hope the events will facilitate conversations between community members, and across cultures.

"The arts are a great opportunity to open dialogue and build bridges," Alba said, "We need that more than ever."

IF YOU GO

What: Murals Matters

When: June 15-18 online, in-person from 4-6 p.m. June 18 at Watsonville Plaza.

Where: Virtual documentary screenings at watsonvillefilmfest.org. Pop-up event at the Plaza.